

OUT OF TIME

Issue No. 23

Out of Control--Lesbian Committee to Support Women Political Prisoners

June 1994

HAPPY 5th BIRTHDAY OUT OF TIME

In January, 1987 a group of SF lesbians came together to shut down the Federal Bureau of Prisons High Security Unit (HSU) for women political prisoners in Lexington, Kentucky and to publicize the existence of women political prisoners in the u.s. We called ourselves Out of Control. As part of the national campaign to shutdown Lex, a few of us helped to publicize the newsletter, The Outside Agitator. After two years of intense struggle, the HSU at Lex was closed. The newsletter was no longer necessary and stopped being published. We wanted a newsletter about the women from Lex and the other women political prisoners and POWs, so in June of 1989, five years ago, we put out the first issue of our newsletter Out of Time. It's been a long five years. The face of the world has changed dramatically. The political prisoners remain inside; many are activists engaging in AIDS related work. Out of Time provides an avenue for news from the inside to get out and a link in a network of prison related resources. We include national and international material. Articles cover cases of political prisoners, human rights violations in prisons in general and other newsworthy items that affect the prison community. We're proud of our five years and hope we can bring 5 more years of news about women political prisoners and the struggle for humanity of those locked up in the u.s. and around the world.

COMPASSIONATE RELEASE

On May 9th a federal superior court judge granted JOANN WALKER compassionate release from the central california women's prison in Chowchilla. Joann's release is a tribute to the work she has done to better the lives of women with AIDS in california prisons. The victory came after her diligent work to improve health care at Chowchilla prison. She organized an AIDS peer education program when there was almost no information given by the prison. She has been very outspoken to the press about terrible health conditions there. When Betty Jo Ross, a terminally ill prisoner with AIDS, was getting barely minimal care, Joann obtained over 1100 signatures from sister prisoners demanding her release. She also organized prisoners to wear signs saying FREE BETTY. A phone, letter, and fax campaign was done on the outside by community activists in contact with Joann, and on January 5, Betty was released. On January 29 there was a demonstration outside the main gate at Chowchilla demanding better health care, peer education, and compassionate release for terminal AIDS patients.

JOANN WALKER recently became very ill with excruciating headaches. The prison doctor gave her tylenol and motrin.

When she began vomiting blood, she was finally taken to the hospital and diagnosed with fungal meningitis. ACT UP had a fax campaign for her compassionate release. And, on May 9th it happened. Joann is now living with her mother.

JOANN SPEAKS"...The women incarcerated at a Central California Women's Facility who have HIV/AIDS virus, are 'guinea pigs'...the medical department and its so called doctors have been learning about the virus at the expense of the women prisoners. Some women have paid the highest price that any human could ever pay. They paid with their lives! I sit and wonder who will be next...I have full blown AIDS, with a T4-cell count below 50. I have spots on my lungs, knots appearing all over my body, sores that come and go on my head, my tongue is coated white, I have a very bad cough...I went to the doctor to find out what was wrong. I was told by R.N. Wolf (the nurse for the HIV yard) that my symptoms were insignificant...I have been pleading, begging, crying for an investigation of medical negligence....I am no longer begging...I am demanding one!..."

NORMAN JEAN NEWS

The current legal battles continue, with all attention now focused on the federal court in Sacramento. We still await news of oral arguments, which means a public hearing. Many people will be needed to fill the courtroom daily to show that there is public awareness about Norm's case, and that she has lots of support.

Bo's video, SHASTA WOMAN is being shown as part of the 18th S.F. International Lesbian and Gay Film Festival at the Roxie Theater, June 18th 2 PM. It's a documentary with footage of Norm at Chowchilla as well as interviews with three Native women activists, and a Chrystos poem. If you'd like a copy of the video, contact the Norma Jean Croy Defense Committee, Pier 5, San Francisco, CA 94111.

Support for Silvia Strengthens in Italy

When Bill and Hillary traveled through Europe last week commemorating the 50th anniversary of D-Day, the Italian people were ready to show their all out support for Silvia's return to Italy. Posters of Silvia were plastered all over Rome, the media (TV, radio, zines and newspapers) covered the Baraldini story with personal interviews and hard facts. The Italian National Coordination Committee (Release Silvia!) in Rome organized 1000 demonstrators forming a human chain around the city hall. These activities brought attention to Silvia Baraldini's case while the Clintons were in Rome and pressured the current Prime Minister to take a stand on the issue and fight for Silvia's return. The u.s. Justice Dept. is still considering the request.

Garage Sale Saturday, July 30th 11AM

Out of Control: Lesbian Committee to Support Women Political Prisoners and POWs, and Lesbians and Gays Against Intervention (LAGAI) are having our fourth annual garage sale. All proceeds go to a commissary fund for women political prisoners and POWs in u.s. prisons. We need donations! Please offer identifiable or reparable items, and preferably good, saleable clothes and shoes. For pick-up, leave your name, phone number, and a good time to call you back at (415) 647-0158. Sale on Collingwood in the Castro between 18th and 19th Streets.

Murder Incorporated

by Bill Dunne, political prisoner

The U.S. Bureau of Prisons recently designated the U.S. penitentiary at Terre Haute, Indiana, as the facility at which prisoners sentenced to death by the federal courts will be housed until they are executed by lethal injection. The federal government has never previously maintained a death row. Federal executions were formerly carried out at state facilities, the official murder of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg in Sing Sing, New York, in 1953, being a case in point. The last federal execution was in 1962 in Iowa. There are currently five prisoners under federal sentence of death, all pursuant to the drug kingpin law.

USP Terre Haute staff have been moving rapidly to implement the death designation. D unit, a block at the west end of the prison with approximately 60 double cells has been emptied and is being modified to serve as death row. Associate Warden Bledsoe opined that we would "see something in six to nine months." When asked why such a large unit was necessary with only five federal death sentences outstanding, Associate Warden Edenfield said they were just planning for the future. Security is already being beefed up in the wake of the designation with three new gun towers under construction. The decision to establish a federal deathhouse could only have emanated from Clinton's Oval office, given its unprecedented nature.

With great fanfare, president Clinton announced his new crime plan on August 10, 1993. A centerpiece of the package is an expansion to 47 of the crimes for which one may receive a federal death penalty. Included also are limitations on the appeals available to persons under sentence of death.

Singapore ad nauseam

The following article contains graphic descriptions of human torture in u.s. prisons. Viewer discretion advised.

While the u.s. mainstream press for weeks on end splashed the front page with the "caning" of an american street artist side-tracked by vandalism in Singapore and thousands of letters from irate u.s. activists were mailed, there were many abuses against inmates in u.s. prisons ignored by most of the dailies. A few examples follow:

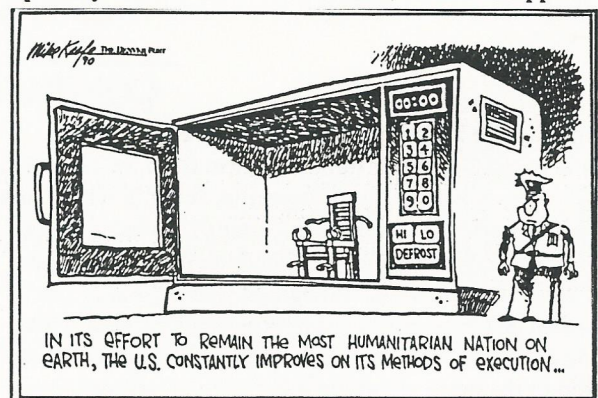
-Pelican Bay Control Unit. Vaughn Dortch, a mentally unstable inmate was found eating his own shit in his cell. Guards ordered to clean him up, forcefully held him in a tub of boiling water for 15 minutes. He suffered 3rd degree burns over more than half his body. No disciplinary action has been taken against the guards. Contact PBIP, 2489 Mission St., #28, San Francisco, CA 94110.

-Westville, Indiana MCC. Pepper and tear gassing of prisoners, prisoners chained to their bed frames, full body probes whenever they leave their cells, cells are air-conditioned in winter and heated in summer. Inmates had to petition the court for extra clothing and blankets in winter. After receiving their warm clothes, prison officials upped the thermostat and collected the warm clothes for laundering. It was weeks before inmates' thermal underwear were returned. Contact CAICU, PO Box 14075, Chicago, IL 60614-0075.

-Hobby Unit -Marlin, TX. Cathy "Cat" Oger, a recently arrived prisoner, protested the abusive language guards routinely use against women prisoners. A half dozen male guards body-slammed her on the floor, handcuffed her, and put her in segregation, calling her anti-woman and anti-lesbian names throughout the ordeal. Write to Ana Lucia Gelabert #384484, Rt. 2, Box 600, Marlin, TX 76661-9772.

-Chowchilla, CA. Daily medical neglect of women prisoners with AIDS leading to numerous untimely deaths. In Feb. Molly Reyes died when prison officials took an hour to respond to calls for help when she was found puking blood and guts in her cell. The next morning when her roommate called Ms. Reyes' family to offer her sympathy she found they had not been told of her death. Letters to demand a legislative investigation should be sent to Assemblyman John Burton, 455 Golden Gate Ave., San Francisco, CA 94103. Contact for more info: Coalition to Support Women Prisoners at Chowchilla, PO Box 14844, San Francisco, CA 94114, (510)530-6214.

u.s. activists are so quick to criticize human rights abuses in other countries, while ignoring what's happening in our own backyard. Express your concern to the above groups or persons.



LEONARD PELTIER FREEDOM WEEKEND

At least half the queers we know are in New York for the 25th anniversary/celebration of the STONEWALL RIOT which was the ignition spark that pushed us to really organize Gay Liberation into a movement. Out of that grew many Lesbian groups that then blended with Women's Liberation and Lesbian Feminist thought became a reality.

During this same time period AIM (American Indian Movement) was also mobilizing. There was that infamous "incident at Ogala" and Leonard Peltier was framed for the murder of two f.b.i. trespassing perpetrators. Twenty years later he still remains in prison. All the "legal" paper shaking is over and the federal courts have denied everything and further declared that all avenues of appeal are exhausted.

On the same weekend as our Stonewall stuff in NY, there will be an International Leonard Peltier Freedom Weekend in Washington D.C. June 25 is traditionally celebrated as the day of the defeat of General Custer, so many important events are scheduled around this time. Sunday June 26 there will be a Spiritual Walk led by the Keeper of the Sacred Pipe and other honored Spiritual leaders. There will be Pipe Carriers, Sundancers, and Indian activists from different nations. A rally will take place in Lafayette Park across the street from the White House.

Leonard's presence will be felt at Stonewall via big screen. And we hear that some queer is going to be a respectful part of the Spiritual Walk. Leonard's application for executive clemency is currently being reviewed by the u.s. deputy attorney general. Native Peoples have offered presidents Clinton and Hillary the Sacred Pipe hoping that they will look into their hearts and make a fundamental human rights decision to grant Leonard Peltier's FREEDOM.

You can show support by calling the White House
...202-456-1111 or fax 202-456-2461.

3 Strikes You're in Forever

"tricky dick" might be dead but he left us neck deep in his right wing hysteric "crusade" against "crime in the streets". He unleashed an unholy war on drugs that continues to this day, costing u.s. taxpayers billions of dollars but doing little to quell the country's drug epidemic. Maybe that's cuz there is suppose to be a drug epidemic aimed at Black & other poor communities. How better to condition the public to ignore the spiraling unemployment, lousy medical care, homelessness, poor education and starvation in the ever expanding ghettos? Who takes home the billions of untaxable dollars made from illegal drug sales?? It sure ain't that street corner pusher, and it ain't his little supplier who most likely just has a neighborhood. The chain of command is multi-tiered and the top dicks are white and so are their collars.

"war on drugs" has come to mean an end to rehabilitation and treatment programs; an end to any exploration of more effective and more economical alternatives. Prisons are very big business! Humane conditions are not even a consideration in the 90's with all the plans for new prisons in every county in california.

In addition to all that, prison allows a dumping ground for the disposable bottom rungs of the working class, working poor, and just plain poor. These are all part of the ever growing classes whose edges merge and overlap increasingly all the time in the u.s because of industrial automation, computers, relocation of factories, and just plain shitty retraining programs. Everyone knows that crime rates jump proportionally to economic crisis. In order to maintain the unequal distribution of wealth, an under employed and unemployed class is created causing extreme poverty and desperation. This class has no choice but to survive by taking what they are denied by the powers that be.

Three strikes your out opens the door to direct and permanent exploitation of poor people from unemployment to prison for life. This all seems very contrary to the constitutional principle of NO debtors' prisons. england was in similar economic crisis when they came over here to steal this land from the Indian people who lived here. Seven years of indentured servitude was the price then for so called freedom from debtors' prisons in england. Whether it's military war or economic war, poor and working people are the front line/disposable cannon fodder of the rich ruling class.

The california legislature approved the most stringent of 5 different Three Strikes measures designed to put 3rd time felons away for 25 to life. Good-old-right-wing-bought-and-paid-for-governor-pete wilson demanded nothing less. He wanted the one that applied stiff penalties not just to violent 3rd felonies but also to milder things like burglary and even petty theft. The Polly Klaas case was used to stoke the fires of hysteria,

but not even Polly's grandfather is fooled by the severity of this bill. He has publically stated that he was originally fooled by the 3 strike plan and told that it would only be for three violent crimes. If there is a need for life imprisonment for mass murders and rapists, it realistically pertains to less than 1% of all people in prison.

Three Strikes will spark the next wave of california's prison-building boom. The state already has the largest prison system in the country, and is second in the world only to China. Estimates are that the new law will "force" the state to construct 20 more prisons by the year 2000 (there are already 28).

California Department of Corrections has become our Pentagon, and continuing in that tradition to grow and soak up more and more money. In 1980, state funding for prison was \$300 million; by 1995 it will be \$3 billion. CDC estimates that Three Strikes will add 275,000 inmates by 2025, costing \$22 billion for construction plus annual operating costs of about \$6 billion. One theory used to justify all this severe punishment by the master of unreason is that 70% of all crime is committed by 6% of felons. But, as usual, this theory is pure shit! Last year, for example, there were 4,000 murders in california, 46 of them (less than 1.2%) were committed by parolees.

We as a people, as a state, and as a country need more flexibility for humane treatment by our institutions; particularly in the area of drug offenders. The historic ratio between violent and nonviolent offenders has been reversed by the hundreds of minimum sentencing laws passed in the last ten years. In 1977, 60% of all prisoners classified as violent; today it's down to about 43%. Moreover, 1/4 of all prisoners (more than 1/2 of non-white prisoners) are doing time for drug offenses. The u.s. government studies say that 70-80% of prisoners are drug or alcohol abusers with at least half under the influence at the time of the crime.

All reports say that well run treatment programs show recidivism rates greatly reduced, and that such treatment would save considerable money on the long run. The permanent damage done by the prison system is deplorable at best and certainly the greatest crime of all. "...It's like abused kids who are locked in a closet for years. When they get out they're not of this earth"... related one ex-prisoner.

The best approach to dealing with crime is to prevent it before it happens; to attack its causes, rather than only trying to arrest and punish the criminals. This means better schools, better social awareness and responsibility about decent housing and hunger and abusive families. In california just the opposite is happening: during the past ten years the prison budget has grown three times faster than the education budget.

Reading Material

PRISON NEWS SERVICE: a bulldozer publication, is an excellent newspaper covering many prison struggles in Canada, the u.s. and internationally. They're very supportive of political prisoners and include many articles written by prisoners. PO Box 5052 Sta. A, Toronto Ontario M5W 1W4 Canada. Free to prisoners, \$10. for others.

The following newsletters are specifically about control units, their proliferation and the struggles to shut them down.

PELICAN BAY PRISON EXPRESS, Pelican Bay Information Project, 2489 Mission St. #28, San Francisco, CA 941102.

SHUT THEM DOWN, Colorado Coalition to Shut Down Control Unit Prisons, Rocky Mountain Peace Center, PO Box 1156, Boulder, CO 803063.

HUMAN RIGHTS HELD HOSTAGE, Committee for Freedom Publication, PO Box 14075, Chicago, IL 60614-00754.

WALKIN STEEL, Committee to End the Marian Lockdown, PO Box 578172, Chicago, IL 60657-8172

The Invisible Woman Prisoner

"It's not that there aren't news stories on women in prison--well-informed reports crop up regularly. But when the discussion is national crime policy, women--consistent with the media's notion that they are separate from the category of regular humans--fade away." Because women still only make up 5.7% of the prison population, and they don't usually commit "sensational" crimes, they are ignored. More that 50,000 women are now in prison; this is a 275% increase in 12 years. According to the fbi, women do not go to jail for violent crimes. (Only 11.3% fall into any kind of violent category.)

What did increase was imprisonment for non-violent crime, such as, forgery, shoplifting, and drugs. A single mother is almost required to resort to illegal activity if she is to feed and cloth two children on a \$400 AFDC cash grant. Poverty is clearly the crime.

Judge Gladys Kessler of the National Association of Women Judges says, "Women offenders are being incarcerated where, previously, they would have been given different types of community-based sentences..."

Women are thrown in jail at the lowest, most easily arrested rung of the drug crime business. This is a direct result of new mandatory sentencing guidelines. Women prisoners are runaways, 1/4 have attempted suicide, >50% have been physically abused, and 36% sexually abused. 22% have been unemployed for 3 years and 57% are women of color.

Every issue of OUT OF TIME is put together by two or three members of Out of Control (OOC) on a rotating basis. The group as a whole doesn't edit each issue, and the articles included don't necessarily reflect the views of everyone.

Thank you's

Last issue we made a plea for funds to help copy and mail Out of Time. Thank you to our readers who contributed so generously. We received close to \$200 in donations and an anonymous donation for \$1000. Your support is heartfelt and warm--thanks again.

The LAGAI/OOC newsletters benefit held May 14th at the Women's Building raised \$1200. Thanks to the performers, Jewel Gomez, Chrystos, Cherrie Moraga, Hank Donat, and musicians, Judy Grayboyes, Renaye Brown, and Yolanda Noriega. Special thanks to Margaret Sloan-Hunter for being a marvelous emcee. Extra special thanks to all the workers who donated their time. Thanks to all the bakers and Old Wives Tales and Modern Times for the use of their chairs. And thanks to all who attended and supported this successful event.

These benefits offer us proof of the growing support for people inside u.s. prisons, and the importance of Lesbian and Gay progressive politics and liberation. Thanks again.

u.s. Just-us Stats

A Black man is 7 times more likely to go to prison than a white man.

A Black woman is 8 times more likely to go to prison than a white woman.

One out of two Black men will be arrested in his lifetime.

One out of four Black men will go to prison in his lifetime.

The incarceration rate for Black people in the U.S. is 5 times the incarceration rate for Black people in South Africa.

Black people are 4 times as likely as white people to be arrested on drug charges--even though the two groups use drugs at almost the same rate.

It costs more to send a person to prison for a year than to Harvard University for a year.



LAGAI/OOC

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